



TRUE Colors

Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services

Dear Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Robin McHaelen. I live in Manchester, CT and am the Executive Director of True Colors, Inc., a state-wide non-profit organization that focuses on the needs and concerns of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ⁺) youth and families.

I am writing to support of S.B. 1: *An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave* and H.B. 5003: *An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program with an LGBTQ+ inclusive definition that reflects the realities our realities.*

A lesbian myself, I have been working on behalf of LGBTQ⁺ youth and families for more than 25 years. Like the majority of workers who are either ineligible or cannot afford to take unpaid leave provided by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), many of my constituents are left out of the supports available to higher income people. LGBTQ+ people of Color as well as people who are transgender or non-binary tend have much higher unemployment rates and are more likely to work in lower paying jobs.

In addition, many of my constituents create chosen family – a close network of friends who serve as the equivalent of a family relationship. This is true across the lifespan for LGBTQ+ folks. Youth are more likely to be homeless or rejected by their families of origin, compelling them to create ‘chosen’ families to which they do not have legal ties. LGBTQ+ older adults are nearly twice as likely as non-LGBTQ⁺ people to live alone. In a recent survey, 42% of LGBTQ⁺ adults between the ages of 45 and 64 said they would depend on close friends in an emergency. This compares to 25% of the general population.

You will likely hear lots of testimony talking about the economic reasons to support paid family leave: It helps CT stay competitive (all the states surrounding CT have paid leave programs); Research shows that paid family leave programs boost an employer’s bottom line; It has a neutral or positive effect on employee turnover.

I am asking you to support inclusive language not just because it is economically appropriate, but because it is the right thing to do. Families matter - even (maybe even especially) when your family is your closest friend. Thank you for your time and consideration

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW
Executive Director